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ABSTRACT

Various aspects of the academic growth of Catholic higher education are discussed. It is concluded that Catholic higher education is not nearly as weak as it used to be but not nearly as good as it can be. Schools could be much better now than they are if the relationship between the religious order and the educational institution was clarified, and if the men who were selected to be the top level administrators were so chosen because of their competence and vision in higher educational administration and not for extraneous reasons having to do with the internal structure of the religious order. (Author)

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What is going on in Catholic colleges is not merely self-improvement but, as the immigrant and the pre-Vatican ghettos are left behind, self-transformation. Many other religiously affiliated schools have gone through similar processes, in most instances losing many of their religious dimensions in the self-transformation. But self-transformation of higher educational institutions has rarely, if ever, occurred on so large a scale or so abruptly, or with the same vigorous intention to preserve their uniquely religious character while transforming themselves. Given the change in the Catholic population it is not at all surprising that Catholic colleges would change; on the contrary, such change is almost inevitable and evidence reported in previous NORC studies indicating that the graduates of Catholic colleges were as likely to go on to graduate training in the arts and sciences as graduates of other colleges ought not to come as a shock. The more important question is why some Catholic colleges have changed more rapidly than others and why some apparently do not change at all. Granted that favorable environmental conditions and the pressure from the changing population for academic growth exist, why do some schools put aside the old and more parochial norms which guided their early years and choose new norms very similar to those to be found in other American colleges and universities while, at the same time, other Catholic schools continue in the tradition of the past, acquiescing but minimally to the goals and

values of the larger American educational enterprise? Why do some schools continue to defend the faith, while other institutions seem more interested in improving their faculties? Why do some continue the traditional familialistic and paternalistic approach to academic organization while others become much more professional and collegial in their styles of administrative behavior? A school can be viewed as a system of relationships, both internal and external, among faculty, students, administrators, alumni, parents, contributors, other schools, ecclesiastical authorities, and civic community. Somewhere in this pattern of relationships there must be found an explanation of why one school changes and another does not. Financial resources play a crucial role in the qualitative improvement of almost any American institution, educational or not, but only in rare instances does money come in unsolicited and unsought, so the mere availability of financial resources in itself is not a sufficient explanation of growth. One must ask, rather, what the higher educational institution does about the resources that are available, how they are collected, and then how they are spent. Similarly, the social class of the students is surely a relevant factor since well-to-do students are an indication of parental resources which the school can tap and also a promise of future well-to-do alumni who can safely be expected to support their alma mater. On the other hand, money must be collected and it must be spent, and the mere presence on campus of well-to-do young people is surely not in itself a guarantee that the money either will necessarily be collected or spent wisely.

Furthermore, the physical location of the school could have an important part to play in its growth. If the school, for example, must

compete with a large number of similar institutions in the same area, it may not be able to amass the resources which will make for a favorable balance among the various relationships which are part of its social system. Again, a school that is located far from a center of Catholic population may not have an adequate base of Catholics either to fill its desks or to provide the finances necessary to keep it going, much less to create the margin necessary for improvement. Finally, given the rather close relationship between a Catholic school and the ecclesiastical authority of the Church, it is quite possible that a favorable ecclesiastical setting will be highly conducive to academic improvement. If Church authorities in particular areas are resistant to change and development then it might be rather difficult for a college to improve while if, on the other hand, the ecclesiastical atmosphere is progressive and dynamic then there may even be pressure on the schools for academic growth.

Sheer size could be either an asset or a liability for a Catholic college or university. If the school is too small then it may simply not have enough students or enough finances to sustain the overhead necessary to make academic growth feasible. If, on the other hand, it is too big, it is quite possible that its resources will be spread out thin and in too many diversified projects for there to be the sort of focus required for qualitative improvement. Given the relatively authoritarian stance of the Catholic Church in the centuries after the Council of Trent, it could well be that an absolute prerequisite for academic growth is a decline of paternalism and the Catholic college and the increase of

academic freedom and faculty participation. Thus, measures of freedom and faculty participation might be very useful indicators of whether the school has indeed broken out of its old ecclesiastical ghetto and began the pursuit of excellence, however this concept may be defined.

Since most Catholic colleges and universities are owned and administered by various religious orders of the Roman Catholic Church, it may well be that the traditions and spirit of the religious community could play a crucial role in the school's improvement, with some of the more progressive orders (Jesuits having an international reputation for being Catholic educators) presiding over schools that are rapidly improving, while others, more careful and conservative in their traditions, might be more reluctant to break with the methods and the goals of the past.

However, even the most cursory reading of the history of colleges and universities makes it quite clear that the administrative leadership of the school is crucial in its attempts to improve. While the William Rainey Harpers of the world are few and far between, it is not hard to find a name or series of names which can be linked to the dramatic growth of almost any great school. Without necessarily having to subscribe to the Great Man theory of history as having universal relevance, it could still be affirmed, at least as far as colleges and universities go, that the leadership of the president is often the difference between stagnation and growth. Some of the "multiversities" are so big and so complex it may well be that one man can have a major influence on their development, but none of the Catholic schools are terribly large as American universities go, nor terribly complicated, so an explanation of why

one Catholic school grows more rapidly than others must surely take into account the personality and the ability of the presidents of the two institutions.

Money, social class, location, size of the population base, ecclesiastical setting, the decline of paternalism, and the increase of academic freedom, size and the attitudes of the religious order that owns and administers the schools--all these, or combinations of these--might be the explanation of why one Catholic school grows and another does not. But there is a special dimension to the problem of qualitative improvement in Catholic colleges which may provide us a hint of what the most likely explanation is for that growth which does in fact occur. Anyone who has had even a brief experience with Catholic colleges knows that there is a complicated problem in the relationship between the religious order which owns the school and the educators who administer it. Indeed, the question of how the relationship between the educational institution and the religious community is structured is perhaps the most critical aspect of the school's organization and operation. In most instances, the trustees who are the legal owners of the school are appointed by the religious superior of the community, generally the person called the provincial.[1] The trustees are either identical with the provincial council (that is to say, the advisory body which surrounds the provincial), or are administrators of the school wearing a slightly different hat. The administrative officers of the school themselves are appointed either

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[1]The province is a subdivision of an entire religious order. Thus, for example, the American Jesuits are divided into thirteen provinces.

directly by the provincial or indirectly by the provincial through the general of the religious community in Rome and then are constituted officers from the point of view of civil law by the routine action of the legal trustees.

The relationship among these various sources of authority and power is quite complex and delicate. The legal trustees themselves are generally without any real power. If they are the same people as those who administer the school then when they meet as trustees they in effect sit in judgment on their own efforts and evaluate their own work. If, on the other hand, they are the provincial consultors they act, in most instances, as agents of the provincial. In either case, the administrative officers of the school are in actual fact not at all responsible to their legal trustees but rather responsible to their religious superior who may or may not know anything about the administration of a higher educational institution.

The religious community, at least in its traditional manifestation, can be expected to emphasize obedience, discipline, loyalty, order, respect for familial, diffuse, particularistic, and ascriptive values, whereas, the higher educational institution, at least if it's trying to imitate typical American institutions, will be more likely to emphasize initiative, imagination, creativity, and specific achievement, and universal values. A man may have all the talents necessary to be an extraordinarily effective college administrator and yet be deemed by the provincial as not the sort of man whom the religious community can safely trust with power and responsibility. Similarly, from the point of view of the provincial, the person who would be an ideal religious superior might in fact

turn out to be a very poor academic administrator. In addition, the provincial and the religious community are very likely to have many other religious works under their direction in addition to higher education. High schools, parishes, missions, retreat houses--all of these are the responsibility of the provincial and he must view the total needs of the religious order as being superior to the needs of any one specific kind of institution, even if it happens to be a university which aspires to greatness.

As a result, the administrators of Catholic colleges are all too frequently chosen by people who do not understand the needs and problems of higher education and must be concerned about other and sometimes more pressing needs (or at least from their viewpoint) than the needs of a college or university. In addition, the religious superior is often in a position where the pressures of the community and the multiple responsibilities of his office force him to view with great concern the innovations which a college administrator might be attempting. He will be warned by some of the older men in the order that the traditions of the community are being violated or that the school was being given away to the laity or that grave financial risks are being taken which may bankrupt the religious order. Even if the provincial does not take these pressures seriously, the very fact that the members of the order are in a position to bring these pressures to bear on the provincial may severely inhibit the freedom of movement of the university administrators, especially when the financial officer of the school is, in many instances, more the agent of the provincial or the religious superior than he is of the college

president. Under such circumstances, it might well be supposed that a Catholic college president would be most effective towards accelerating the growth of his school when he is able to structure the relationship between the school and the religious community in such a fashion as to guarantee the maximum freedom of movement and independence of the school that is compatible with its being owned by the religious community. In the preliminary thinking that went into this paper it was hypothesized that given a reasonably favorable geographic environment, and a reasonably favorable financial situation, the key to the academic growth of the Catholic college would be the competence of the top level administrator, a competence manifested both by the administrator's understanding of what an American higher educational institution ought to be and how one is created, and by his ability to create a situation in which he could pursue basically academic goals with a minimum of interference and a maximum support of the religious community. Political skills are necessary for all administrators of large corporate bodies but we were hypothesizing that Catholic college administrators not only had to have the intellectual and political skills that any college president might be expected to have, they needed the special skills to create a relationship between the school and the religious order which would give them the freedom of movement necessary to exercise their more strictly academic and administrative competencies.

Since the legal nature of the relationships between college and religious order have been changed in only a very few Catholic schools we assumed that the ability of the president to obtain freedom of movement and then to use it to restylize the school's operation from the familial to the professional and from the paternalistic to the collegial

would be based on informal working agreements (and often implicit ones at that) which he had managed to arrange with, or to extort from his superiors. It therefore seemed to us that the basic question at issue was whether the religious orders which still staff the principal administrative positions in the Catholic colleges and universities are capable of producing the kind of academic administrator and bring into Catholic higher education the academic and administrative norms operative in most American colleges and universities without, at the same time, so affecting the relationship between the school and the university as to endanger the continuity of the administration.

It will be perceived that there are two elements in our hypothesis. The first element is that the school will grow more rapidly which has administrative leadership which accepts the basic American higher educational values and styles. The second element is that since these styles are at variance with at least that which has traditionally been considered the proper spirit of a Roman Catholic religious order, the leadership of an academically improving Catholic school must, by one means or another, create acceptance within the religious order for the innovations it proposes so that it has the flexibility and freedom of movement to direct the school in rapid qualitative expansion.

We therefore began to expect that if a rank ordering of Catholic higher educational institutions could be based on sophisticated perception of the amount of enlightenment and independence to be observed at the administrative leadership level, such a rank ordering ought to be highly predictive of academic growth in Catholic higher education. If

there was a positive rank order correlation between academic growth and the competence and independence of the school's administrative leadership, it would follow that the secret of even greater improvement in Catholic higher education would be the appointment of academically qualified administrators who would have the maximum amount of freedom to transform Catholic colleges and universities into schools that were typically American in every way that was compatible with their remaining in some essential sense Roman Catholic.

In attempting to reduce this theorizing into an operational study, it was decided that a useful and interesting way to proceed with the problem of the rank ordering of schools on administrative competence and freedom would be to have a team of presumably sensitive researchers visit a number of Catholic institutions and to observe the patterns in relationship existing among faculty, students, and administrators at these institutions. We were encouraged in this particular study design by the highly successful efforts of Robert Crain and his team of colleagues in their study of the politics of school desegregation and, as Crain states in the introduction to the preliminary report:

> If there is any part of our research we are pleased with it is the method of data collection. Our fears that a week of interviewing in each city would not be enough time proved to be unfounded. We had no difficulty learning a detailed story of a decision. There may be some well kept secrets which we did not uncover but we think that in almost every city we have a story complete enough for analysis. In addition, we found, as other researchers have noted, that a clear impression of a particular tone or style of the city is apparent, although sometimes we were not successful in identifying all the factors which go into making up a city's style of action.

The plan that evolved then was that the three researchers would visit a number of Catholic institutions on which NORC already had considerable information from its previous studies and would attempt to rank these institutions according to the enlightenment and independence of the college or university as viewed through the eyes of the students, faculty, and administrators. The schools would therefore be ranked essentially on the faculty, student, and administration's estimate of competence and efficiency as this estimate was received and evaluated by the research team. The particular schools that would be selected for investigation would be institutions that were selected by others on the NORC staff who had determined by some sort of objective measurement which Catholic schools could be considered growth schools and which ones could not.

Dr. Norman Bradburn and Mr. Donald Treiman of the NORC staff prepared a regression of school quality in 1952 on school quality, 1964, for all the schools which were in the 1961 and 1964 NORC samples. Nineteen Catholic schools and six non-Catholic schools were then selected from the regression line for the survey team to visit. (The non-Catholic schools were included largely for comparative purposes to determine to what extent the problems of Catholic higher education were similar to the problems experienced in most American colleges.)

The nineteen Catholic schools were selected from various points on the regression line so that some of the schools were rapid growth institutions, others moderate growth institutions, and still others slow growth institutions. The research team was then assigned to go out into

the field and separate the educational sheep from the educational goats. It is important to stress at this point that the interviewing team not only did not know where any of the schools were on the regression line of academic growth but also were unaware of what specific variables were used by Messrs. Treiman and Bradburn in preparing the regression line.

Leaving aside at least from the consideration of the present report the very interesting theoretical and methodological implications of a high rank order correlation between the computer analysis and the work of the research team, it is still important to emphasize what such a high correlation would imply. If the research team was able to rank the nineteen Catholic schools in order of their academic growth in a fashion relatively similar to that rank order produced by an analysis based on objective data it would follow that the research team was quite sensitive and insightful in its evaluation of the growth patterns and processes within Catholic higher education. A high rank order correlation would thus provide the research team with authoritative credentials. The researcher could modestly point to high rank order correlation as partial proof that he did in fact understand quite clearly the internal mechanics, problems, and possibilities of Catholic higher education. The conclusions and recommendations made in such a report would not have merely internal plausibility but would have some sort of external evidence to validate the insight and perhaps even the wisdom of the analysts.

It therefore is appropriate to let the statistical cat out of the bag and report what in fact were the rank order correlations put together by the survey team at the end of their long and weary tour of

American Catholicism. The nineteen schools were divided into two groups: the five small girls colleges and the fourteen larger colleges and universities, of which all but one were at least in some fashion coeducational. Each of the three researchers prepared a ranking of the school from the viewpoint of his own particular specialty. The interviewer who worked principally with administrators achieved a correlation of .79 for the coeducational schools and .8 for the girls colleges. The interviewer who worked principally with faculty members achieved a rank order correlation of .83 for the coeducational schools and .8 for the girls colleges. The interviewer who worked with students achieved a .96 rank order for the coeducational schools and a 1.0 rank order for the five girls schools.[2]

Our conclusion therefore was that the leadership role of the president was crucial to the growth of a Catholic higher educational institution. There were five elements in the presidential leadership. First of all, it was necessary for him to symbolize in his own person and in his activities the goals which the institution had set for itself and to radiate confidence and hope that these goals were achievable. Presumably the president would also be the crucial man in determining what the goals are. Since most Catholic highere educational institutions have only the vaguest of goals it is most unlikely that a charismatic president will arrive on the scene to find that the goals had been predefined for him.

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[2] It could be contended that when a twenty-three-year-old A.B. in English can achieve a higher rank order prediction than two professional social scientists there is obviously something wrong with social science; but in a sense it might be argued that at least the social scientists can claim some credit for hiring an interviewer who would be so sensitive to the implications for academic growth of student culture.

Surely in those schools which were clearly growth institutions faculty, students, and administrators were virtually unanimous in explaining the improvement of the institution in terms of the presidential charisma (though, alas, even today not all students, administrators, and faculty are sophisticated enough in the social sciences to use the word charisma in their ordinary conversation).

Secondly, the presidential leader had to be an extraordinarily skilled politician to achieve consensus among the diverse and often opposing groups that constitute the university social system. He had to placate the older members of the religious community and, in many instances, the religious superior, while at the same time encouraging the young turks in the lay and religious faculty and sustain the morale of hard-pressed and threatened administrators. He had to reassure students that they were not forgotten and parents that students were not being given complete license. He had to persuade alumni groups that the finest traditions of the school were being maintained while at the same time persuade government agencies and foundations that the school was undergoing drastic reform and innovation. It was a delicate balancing act and at least in some institutions seemed to require that the president not be bound by the strictest and most literal interpretation of truth.

Thirdly, the president ought to have the knowledge and the skills necessary to determine what an educational institution is and how his particular school ought to become one. He had to be an ambassador to the outside world and from the outside world, a transmitter of the educational values of the larger American higher educational enterprise to the Catholic system. It was necessary for him to persuade his various

constituencies that the norms of American higher education were not merely not opposed to the norms of traditional Catholicism but were in fact simply the logical development of Catholic principles and philosophy.

Fourth, the president had to play a key role in the selection of the lower level administrators and faculty because only he seemed to have enough prestige and influence in the school to legitimize the necessary professionalization of the operation. The president, in other words, had to take an active hand in replacing familial and sacral values with professional and secular values, and he had to do this by making as sure as he possibly could that people appointed to key positions in the faculty and administration had these professional, collegial, and secular values without which a school simply could not claim to be an American higher educational institution.

Finally, the president was, in most instances, the primary representative of the school to the world of contributors, foundations, and government agencies. All of the presidents of growth schools whom we encountered were masters at this game and indeed some of them would have been college presidents even if they were not clergy or religious (and probably cabinet or sub-cabinet level officers in the Kennedy government to boot). A Catholic college president who is not interested in, or afraid of the role of civic leader, fund raiser, and contact man, whatever his other admirable qualifications, will be a failure as a college president.

As a matter of fact, it often seemed to us that one found either all of these five characteristics--symbolic, charismatic leader, fashioner

of political concensus, educational administrator, innovator of professionalization, and civic leader, were either combined in one person or did not exist by themselves. It was a rare president who could generate enthusiasm or fashion consensus who could not also raise money. And if a president was a poor fund raiser he wouldn't be very good at professionalizing the faculty and administration and would be totally inept at creating a political consensus among his constituencies. It wasn't too difficult to use as a one-question test of the competency of a college president in all these areas to ask him the simple question: "Do you like being a president?" If he did enjoy greatly the challenge, the excitement, the power that flowed from the presidential office then he was very likely to be a superb president.

It can be argued that Catholic college presidents have particularly strong power because in addition to being the academic administrator they are, in most instances, the spiritual leader and the chairman of the board of trustees of the institution. Such combinations of power can make for a very strong president, at least if he chooses to use the power. But there are other factors at work which create unique problems for Catholic presidents that need not be faced in other colleges. First of all, as often the leader, and almost always a member of the religious community, he must be concerned about his brothers (or sisters) in the order. It is therefore much more difficult for him to dismiss the incompetent, to discipline the lazy, and to threaten the rebellious. If he is a good religious superior, a good father to his brothers in the religious community, he must be constantly aware of their needs not merely

as academicians, but also as human beings and as brothers in the Lord. Such demands put additional strain on the Catholic president that would not exist if he were a layman presiding in Christian charity over a non-Catholic institution.

Secondly, in many, if not most, religious communities the president is faced with the inevitable fact that the provincial is keeping a close eye on what he does and making sure that he does not "give the school away to the laity" or risk the reputation of the religious order. In some instances, the provincials are people who have had college experience themselves, who understand what higher education is, and who are sympathetic to the needs and problems of the president. But in a number of other institutions we visited just the opposite seemed to be the case. The president's power, however great it may have been in theory, was severely inhibited in fact by the veto power of the provincial.

Thirdly, in many, if not most of the Catholic institutions we visited the financial officer had power far out of proportion to his actual role in the institution at least in part because he represented the conscience of the religious order and the order's constant fear of serious debt and bankruptcy. In some communities the financial officer, while he may have been in the academic institution the subordinate of the president, was in the religious order his superior with resultant role conflict that hardly needs to be described. In virtually every school we were at the financial officer was extremely conservative, narrow, and, in a good number of instances, not terribly competent. The financial policies that radiated from these officials seemed to be more suited to the depression

than to an age of affluence. One very great Catholic university, for example, is proud of the fact that it has never gone in debt and in order to keep its record unblemished will not even accept government loans for the construction of dormitories despite the fact that it has an acute shortage of dormitory space and a tremendous demand for student enrollment. Such a thoroughly "Protestant" approach to going into debt may be judged by some religious communities to be highly edifying though one fears that most educational administrators would judge it to be sheer stupidity.

Thus, while it seemed to us that the Catholic president had certain advantages over the president of non-Catholic colleges, he was also subject to many disadvantages, but we felt that the real problem was not the day to day administration of the school and the ongoing pattern of relationships between the president and the religious order, but rather the very appointment of the president himself. The decision of how independent from the religious order a university was to be was made the day a president was appointed. If the provincial, through insight or accident appointed the kind of man who had the integrity, the wisdom, the courage, and the political skill to pry an institution free from the restraints that the religious order had imposed upon it, then there was strong probability that the school would begin its great leap forward. If such an appointment had been made by design (as at least in two or three institutions it apparently had) the president's task would be relatively easy because the prior decision had apparently been made in the religious order that the bonds connecting the college and the community were to be loosened.

If, on the other hand, the provincial chose to appoint a "safe" man, that is, say a person who would not create any trouble in the religious community or in the civic or ecclesiastical environment in which the college was placed, he'd choose to appoint someone who was "a good fund raiser" because he had raised money to build a new high school, if he should choose to appoint someone because he would be "a good rector" and take care of the members of the religious order, if he chose to appoint somebody to be relied upon not to give the "school away to the laity," then it was reasonable to assume that there would be little attempt to modify the relationship between the school and the religious order and little academic growth.

It was our reluctant conclusion that more Catholic college presidents belong to the latter category than to the former, that more of them are good, safe, reliable men who will not permit the school to go bankrupt but neither will they advance it any further along the road to excellence than it already is. The crucial problem, then, of Catholic higher education, in our judgment, is not that the administrators are paternalistic. We found paternalism at least as strong in the non-Catholic schools we visited. Nor that academic freedom is unduly restricted (there was adequate academic freedom at most of the Catholic schools we investigated). Nor even that there is not enough faculty participation or student freedom (both of these are consequences of presidential leadership rather than causes of it). No, the real problem with Catholic higher education is not freedom, nor democracy, nor collegiality--the real problem is much more prosaic: it is competence. Nor is the problem even that the religious orders don't have competent people. The

problem is rather that the competent people, the imaginative, the creative, the innovative, are not the ones that the typical provincial is most likely to think about when it comes time to find a new college president. Or to push the problem back one step further, the real difficulty is that those who appoint the presidents in all too many instances are men who do not understand what higher education is all about and who view the needs of the college or university as subordinate to the needs of the religious order. In such circumstances, of course, good appointments do occasionally occur, but more by accident than by design. It would seem to us, therefore, that the solution to the problem of academic growth in Catholic higher education is not necessarily the turning of the schools over to the laity (many of whom would be no more competent than the clergy) or the appointment of laymen to the highest administrative positions (we didn't encounter too many laymen who seemed to be of presidential caliber). It would of course be most appropriate if laymen were represented on the boards of trustees. But the essential reformthat is needed, it seemed to us at the conclusion of our study, was the reform in the appointment of the college president. Either the provincial should be someone who understands what it takes to run an educational institution or the appointment of the president should be vested in the hands of a group (presumably a much more independent board of trustees) who did know. Under such circumstances, we would expect a rather dramatic improvement in the quality of Catholic higher education, especially if simultaneously with this modification of the method of selecting a president there came into being a whole body of customs and laws regulating the relationship

between the religious order and the educational institution which would guarantee that the college or university would have rights and freedoms vis a vis the religious order and would not exist merely as the educational arm of the religious community.

At the end of our Grand Tour the research team was convinced that Catholic higher education is not nearly as weak as it used to be but not nearly as good as it can be. But we would even go further than that--we would argue with all the conviction at our disposal, that the schools could be much better now than they are if the relationship between the religious order and the educational institution was clarified, and if the men who were selected to be the top level administrators were so chosen because of their competence and vision in higher educational administration and not for extraneous reasons having to do with the internal structure of the religious order. The great crime of Catholic higher education is not that it is bad, but that it could, in our judgment, rather easily be so much better than it is.